

# Vergina Necropolis – The Great Tumulus

The Great Tumulus is a hill in Vergina which was excavated by Manolis Andronikos because the mass mound of earth lead him to believe that underneath were tombs, thus excavations began in 1976. The hope was they would be royal tombs to prove N.G.L. Hammond's theory that Vergina could be identified as Aigai, the burial place of the ancient Macedonian kings.

In 1977-8 a looted *Heroon* now known as the *Tomb of Persephone* (because of the wall painting it contains) and two unplundered tombs were excavated. One of these unplundered tombs was identified as being the tomb of Philip II, Alexander the Great's father, suggesting this was in fact the ancient royal city of Aigai.



## Identifying the Remains in Tomb II

The identity of the bones of found in Tomb II has been debated from their discovery up until recently. From the moment of excavation Andronikos declared the bones were that of Phillip II and many agree due to the layout and contents of the tomb, however there are many who contest his identification and even the dating of the site. Philip II is historically meant to have sustained a trauma to the eye, yet Bartsiokas argues that the skeletal remains show no evidence of any type of injury to the orbital area and that it is more likely the bones are that of Philip III Arrhidaeus. However this identification also has flaws as we know from Diodorus Philip III was buried with two other people, his wife and mother-in-law, yet there is only two caskets in Tomb II. The other casket Musgrave points out that while it dose contain the remains of a woman they do not coincide with the remains of a woman of the age Eurydice, Philip III's wife, when she died. So it has been more widely accepted to identify the

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## The Tomb Finds

The unspoilt tombs provide beneficial information about burial, religion, art, armaments and metal work during the time of ancient Macedon. The wall paintings for example are unique as they show 4th Century BC large scale paintings which typically have not survived into modern day. Large amounts of gold was also found, particularly in the tomb of Philip II whose bones were allegedly discovered in a gold casket which also contained a gold oak wreath which he would have worn on his head when placed on the funeral pyre. In the main chamber of this tomb two chryselephantine couches were discovered, little of the wooden frame survived but the decorative gold, glass and ivory remained in good condition.

